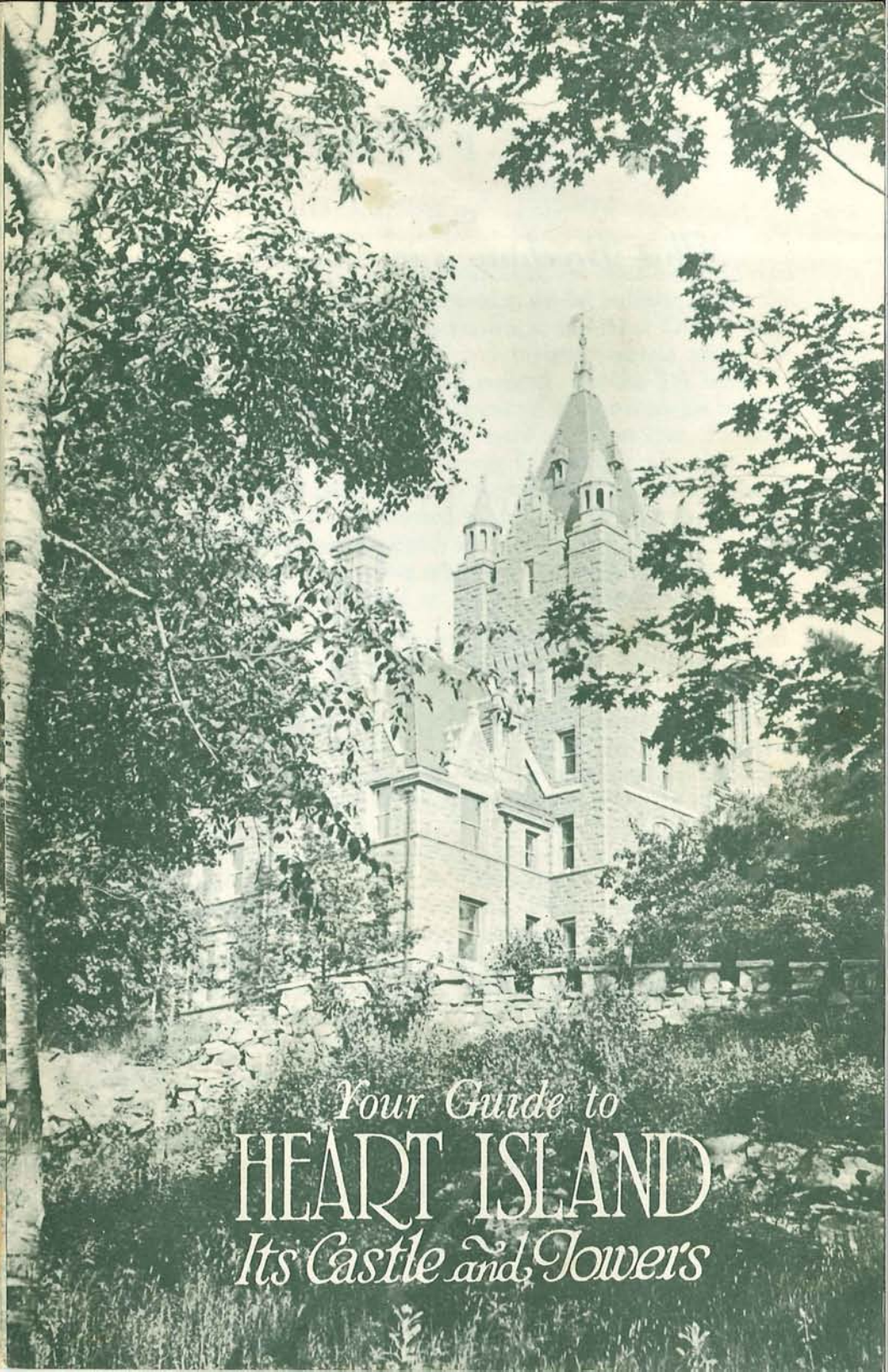


Your Guide to

HEART ISLAND

Its Castle and Towers

This Brochure is in Two Parts

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Part I.

HISTORY OF THE CASTLE

Part II.

GUIDE TO POINTS OF INTEREST

HEART ISLAND

Its Castle & Towers

A SCENE of beauty in itself, yet more beautiful than its outward appearance would indicate, when the romance of it is known, is the Boldt Castle which rises with lofty and majestic turrets above the waters of the St. Lawrence. As the Taj Mahal of India is the monument of a mogul to his beloved wife, so the Boldt Castle is the monument of a great love. Intended as the summer home for Mrs. George C. Boldt, it was near completion when its intended matron passed away. From a scene of busy activity it was transformed in an hour to a tomb of quiet. An army of workmen dropped the instruments of their art and silence descended on the place. A telegram from Mr. Boldt stopped all activities and it remained an incompleted mansion.

This is but one phase of the romance which surrounds this beautiful place. Probably the first white man who ever cast his eyes upon Heart Island was the intrepid Samuel de Champlain, the founder of New France. While returning from an expedition to the Huron country in 1615, he struck boldly across Lake Ontario and turned the prows of his canoes into the St. Lawrence and the Thousand Islands territory. He was struck by the natural beauty of the islands and mentions them in the journal of his travels. The next white visitor of note was the Jesuit father, Simon Le Moyne who traversed their tortuous passages when he visited the Onondagas. After Le Moyne came La Salle and Frontenac, De la Barre, La Hontan, Hennepin, Charlevoix and others who helped found the empire of New France. To the Indians the majestic river was known as Ho-che-la-ga Ga-hunda, and they knew every turn and twist in the multitude of channels.

And it was here that the piratical Bill Johnston had his rendezvous as he was hunted now by the British and now by the Americans for his many misdeeds. About this character have grown many tales, some historical and a great many more legendary. But Bill Johnston was a real person as was his beautiful daughter, Kate. And, if we are to believe legend, Bill Johnston more than once

hid himself away on Heart Island and there his daughter silently rowed at night, bringing him food and news concerning his pursuers.

It was off the dock at Wellesley Island, that Bill Johnston's greatest exploit took place. It was on the night of May 29, 1838, that the British steamer, Sir Robert Peel, tied up at Wellesley Island for wood. Johnston, at the head of a band of men disguised as Indians, rushed on board, robbed the passengers and drove them ashore and set fire to the boat. Why? It was war, but not a war which finds a prominent place in history because it was an abortive attempt of a few to free Canada from British rule. For this a reward was offered for Johnston's capture, but for many months he evaded his pursuers.

As one can scarcely travel anywhere in the Heart Island region without finding romance, so the life of George C. Boldt was a romance in itself. Born in Prussia of comparatively poor parents, he often saw the castles along the Rhine and dreamed dreams. As he gazed on the ivy-covered turrets he dreamed that some day he would build such a castle for himself. He came to America and all the world knows that when he died he was the world's greatest hotel man, owner of the Waldorf-Astoria of New York and the Bellevue-Stratford of Philadelphia and a multi-millionaire. He was also president of the Waldorf-Astoria Segar Co., the Appollinaris Importation Co., director of the Commonwealth Trust Co., the Lincoln Trust Co., the North British and Mercantile Insurance Co. of London, a trustee of Cornell University, and director of the Hotel Association of New York.

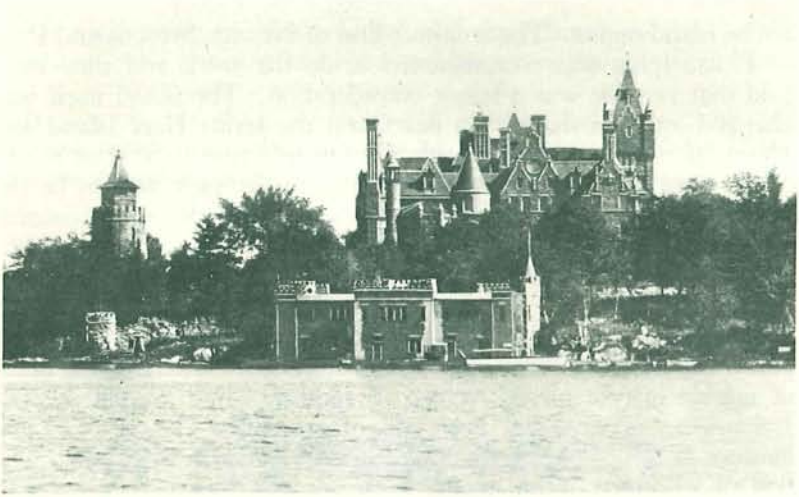
To dream and to do—these were synonyms. And Boldt Castle, on Heart Island, in the St. Lawrence River, stands as an eternal monument to the memory of a man whose dreams were no whit more far-reaching than his capabilities. There is the enormous, gigantic structure, finished in its incompletion, the obvious project of a great mind set to do great things in a great way, for the very reason of the fact that it remains wilfully half done.

It was over 70 years ago that Mr. Boldt and his wife first came to the Thousand Islands. They were much impressed with the beauties of the place and Mr. Boldt bought Heart Island of G. K. Hart and remodeled the building for a summer home. About 60 years ago he began to make real the dream of his youth. He began the construction of what was to be the finest summer home in the

entire island region. The architect firm of Hewitt, Stevens and Paist of Philadelphia was commissioned to do the work and they were told that expense was a minor consideration. The island itself was changed into the shape of a heart and the terms Hart Island and Heart Island are interchangeably used in referring to it. But it was to be more than a summer home. The castle itself was to be the heart of a colony. Though the drawings were made by professional architects the real inspiration was furnished by Mr. and Mrs. Boldt. They furnished the ideas and the architects furnished the technical details. It was not a work that called for artisans; it demanded artists and they came from all over the world to contribute their bit to this house of wonders. From Italy were brought the finest of marble mantle pieces, carved of spotless white marble as only Italians can carve them. From all corners of the Old World came mosaics, carvings, tapestries and sculpture to adorn this place. The best of workmen, mural painters, electricians, landscape gardeners, masons and the most skilled of all crafts came there.

From the quarries owned by Mr. Boldt on Oak Island ten miles away came barge after barge of granite. Tons of sand to be used in mixing the mortar were dug out of Mr. Boldt's own sand pits. The roofing material was made of terra cotta. It was to be the last word in beauty. Through a terraced effect, the approach from the river shore to the walls of the castle mounts steadily and the island itself seems to have been constructed so as to make a perfect setting for this architectural gem. The buildings rise in sheer, though not bold, relief; rather they merge into the background yet they are distinct.

The castle itself was intended to be the central point of the whole scheme which called for eleven buildings. It is large enough to satisfy one hundred guests and their servants. On the first and second floors are the reception room, the ball room, the dining room, the library and billiard room. On the upper floors are bedrooms, but the term does not satisfy. They are more than bedrooms, they are apartments with a private bath for each. Each bedroom has an attractive tapestry brick fireplace and whole families could be accommodated in the wings intended to be used as sleeping quarters. From the lower floor to the second is a grand stairway, regal in its splendor. One could close his eyes and see striding down its way, Samuel de Champlain, his sword clanking against the marble treads. It would form a perfect setting for the days of chivalry, with the lords and



Heart Island from Wellesley Island

ladies. Exquisite tapestries had been purchased to adorn its walls. Graceful chandeliers had been purchased to shed their light on these scenes of regal splendor.

And this was to be but one of the buildings. Fashioned after a Rhine chateau is the Alster tower down by the water's edge. This is a reproduction of an ancient castle along the Rhine, a castle which Mr. Boldt passed many times as a boy and of which he so often dreamed. This was the first structure of the group to be erected and Mr. Boldt used it as a summer residence when the work of building the castle was going on. It stands on the edge of the island and is built of brown stone. Its base of masonry is about twenty feet high and is approached on its four sides by flights of stone steps bordered by heavy balustrades. This was intended by Mr. Boldt for the entertainment of his guests. The "Shell Room," so called because of the shape of its roof, was to be used for dancing. In the basement is the bowling alley, and on the floors above plans called for a library, a billiard room, cafe, grill and kitchen with bedrooms on the upper floors. Though merely an annex to the main castle, it in itself is a place which is equalled by few. From its tower one has a view of the islands which is excelled nowhere.

Beauty has not been lost sight of in the utilitarian things of this

little empire. The power house at the eastern end of the island is cunningly designed after the fashion of a medieval tower, and within its artistic walls was to be the generating plant for illuminating the grounds and providing the power for the estate. In the upper floors were to be the rooms of the engineers and mechanics, lodgings that would satisfy the master of most estates. The servants were to be housed in a separate building and Mr. Boldt had an eye to their comfort as he did for all the employees in the vast hotels which he operated. They had their own club house and their own provisions for recreation and diversion.

Retracing his steps to the western end of the island one finds himself looking upon an Arch of Triumph, a water gate through which a stream flows. It is the inlet to the lagoon surrounding nearly half the island.

As the castle itself is the gem, it has been placed in a setting worthy of its great beauty. Nature herself had a hand in this. Instead of covering the island with a forest she covered it with a profuse mass of shrubbery, with rocky shores which readily lent themselves to the art of the landscape gardener. At one side of the castle is the Italian garden, laid out on a rock plateau, elevated so that it can be seen in all its beauty from the river below. Here and there little summer houses and pavilions have been reared, blending so beautifully with the flowers that they seem almost to have been placed there by the hand of Nature herself. Birds, bees and butterflies give the motion which is the finishing touch to this bower of beauty. It was intended by the genius who designed it that fountains, cunningly hidden, would send up their silver spray to sparkle in the sunlight. Surrounding it is a broad promenade enabling one to view its beauties from all sides. At the western end of the island provision was made for the swan pond and at the southern end a tiny fishpond was constructed.

The lagoon, referred to before, is over five hundred feet in length and at one spot is one hundred feet wide. Bordering it on the outside is an embankment covered with trees and shrubs. This outer walk is used as a promenade and it was originally intended to have rustic bridges swung from it across the lagoon.

In addition to Heart Island, Mr. Boldt owned a large share of the lower end of Wellesley Island, the island on which Thousand Island Park is now located. This property in addition to many other pieces of real estate formed the millionaire Boldt Estate. It



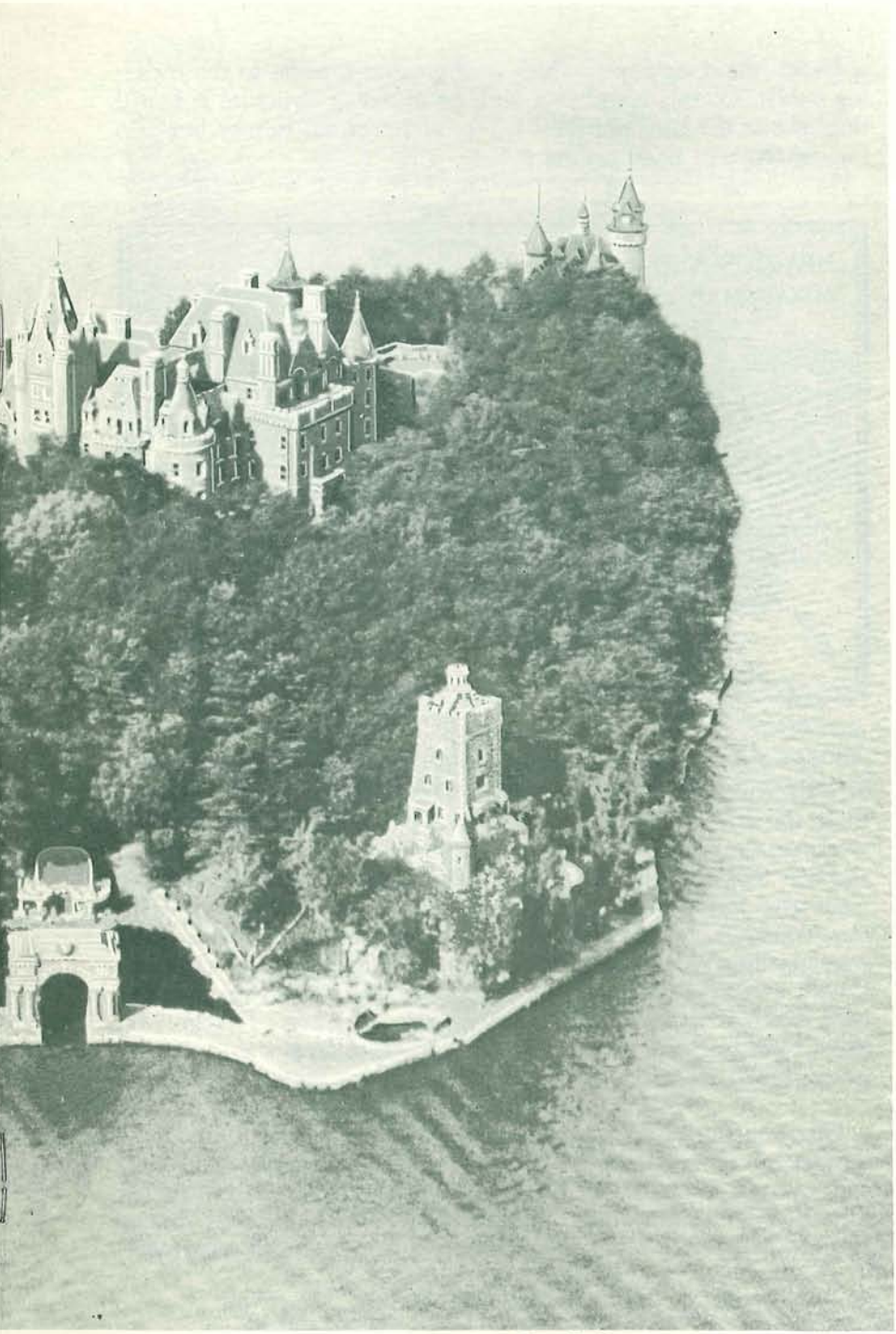
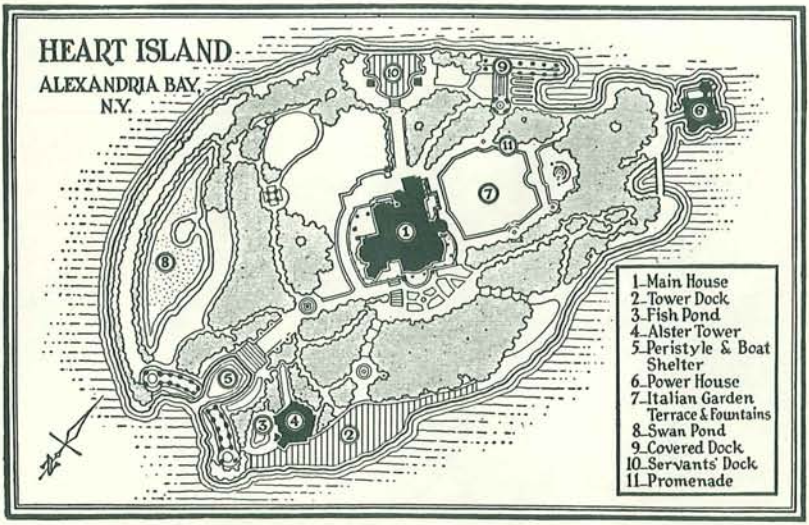


Photo By Davart

is Heart Island, however, which is of greatest interest to the traveling public, for this island gem with its imposing structure is famed throughout the land not only for its architectural beauty but also for the romance built around it.



All this was the dream of one man and one woman. It was to have been the tribute of love. Over Two Million Dollars had been expended on the Boldt Castle when Mrs. Boldt passed away. The army of workmen dropped their tools and the place became deserted. Birds and bats took up their abodes in the dusty halls. Spiders spun their webs over marble fireplaces. Boys threw stones through the plate glass windows. Vandals left their mark. The emptiness of the place was appalling. Thousands of tourists knew its story and gazed on it with awe as they passed or went ashore and walked through the halls which were intended to be the scene of gaiety. Though Mr. Boldt came to the river after the death of his wife, it is said that he never visited what was to be the dream of his life.

Glancing from the lofty height of a window on the top floor of the chateau down into the wonders of nature below, as far as one's eyes can see for miles and miles the thin silver thread of the St. Lawrence winds gracefully in and out among its thousand shores. Here and there the roofs of man-made buildings rise in puny chal-



Power House, Clock and Chimes Tower

lenge. And ever Boldt Castle stands on Heart Island, dominating its part of the world, complete in its incompletion, a silent and proud memory to those who conceived it, the Wonder of the Thousand Islands.

"The Thousand Isles, the Thousand Isles,
Dimpled, the wave around them smiles,
Kissed by a thousand red-lipped flowers,
Gemmed by a thousand emerald bowers;
A thousand birds their praises wake,
By rocky glade and plumy brake;
A thousand cedars' fragrant shade
Falls where the Indians' children played;
And fancy's dream my heart beguiles,
While singing thee, the Thousand Isles."

CALEB LYON.

GUIDE TO HEART ISLAND

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The first room the visitor enters is the Entrance Foyer marked with the numeral "I" enclosed in a green circle. On passing through this foyer one enters the Main Great Hall marked with the numeral "II." From this Hall rises the Grand Staircase, which leads to the floors above, all of which rooms are surrounded by balconies. At the very top of the building is a large circular dome which was to have been enclosed with colored glass and a provision was made for a continuous flow of water over it, lighted by electricity by night and the open sky by day. Originally, the Main Entrance was just to the right of the fireplace in the Main Hall.

Following the green arrows to the right, the next room entered is the Library marked with the numeral "III." This room was to have been finished in Flemish Oak. All of the hard wood and material for finishing the rooms are still stored in the closed portions of the Castle.

Directly on from the Library, marked by the numeral "IV" is the Main Drawing Room. A recess for a pipe organ and also a keyboard for the control of the chimes can easily be noticed. The Westminster chimes located in the power house (now in ruins) at the end of the Island were to have been controlled from this room. The sections of the Castle to the North from this point are entirely closed off. These rooms contain the hard wood trim, furniture and other materials which were to have been used in the completion of the unfinished rooms. This section contains butler's pantries, storerooms, and other facilities in connection with the kitchens which are located in the basement.

Leaving the Drawing Room and again following the green arrows, to the right is the Main Dining Room which directly adjoins the closed portions of the building above referred to. This room is marked by the numeral "V."

Leaving the Dining Room and picking up the green arrows, the visitor climbs the Grand Staircase and around to the right of the second floor is the suite of Master Rooms which were to have been occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Boldt. In these rooms were the master controls of all fire and burglar alarms. All other rooms on this floor were to have been guest rooms. It is suggested that the visitor walk through this floor in order to observe the size and grandeur of the

suites. The other remaining floors above are, in a sense, replicas of this second floor.

Again taking up the green arrows to the third floor, around to the right one finds a suite facing southwest, which was to have been the daughter's rooms. As on the floor below, the rest of the rooms were to have been the guest rooms.

Proceeding upstairs to the fourth floor, around to the right is a suite of rooms that were to have been the son's rooms. The rest of the rooms are, as on the other floors, guest rooms.

Now continuing to the very top floor, one goes up a short flight of stairs to the lookout from which an excellent view of the Thousand Islands and the St. Lawrence River can be obtained.

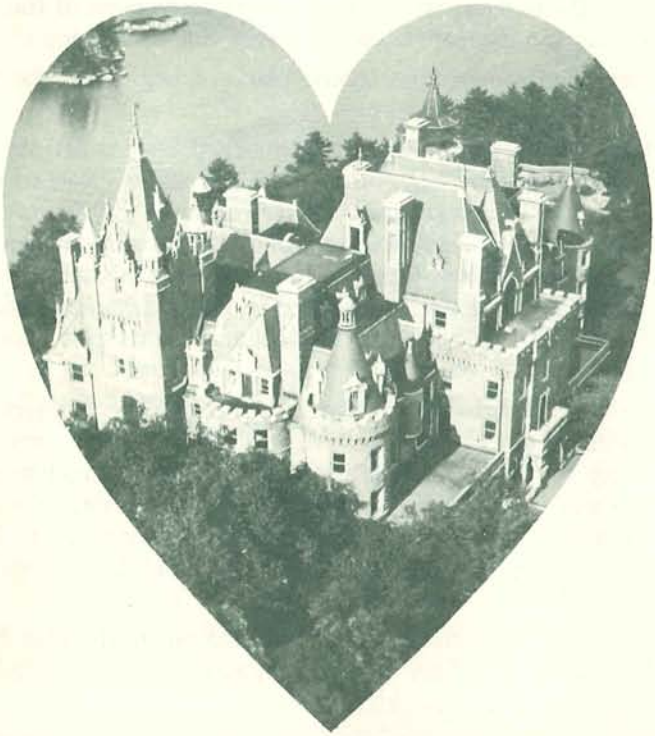
Coming back downstairs to the place of beginning the visitor has two choices:

Within the Castle, another tour marked by red arrows starts from under the Grand Staircase. These red arrows lead to the so-called Moat, or underground passage, and the Swimming Pool. These adjacent basement rooms contain the dressing and lounging rooms which were to have been used in connection with the Swimming Pool. The Pool itself is located on the Alexandria Bay side of the Castle. The lounge near the Pool and the fireplace are easily discernible.

By further following the red arrows through the different areas and sections of the Castle, one will easily locate the rooms where the heating system was, together with the long tunnel in which tramways were to have been established for the carrying of supplies from the water's edge. Also, in this passageway were to be the power lines, cables, and mechanical devices for efficiently operating the household.

Outside the Castle, the green arrows take one to the Play House. This Play House or Alster Tower is more completely described in a previous part of this booklet.

As it is now approaching 75 years since work was started on the Castle, much of the construction has been ruined by time, neglect or vandalism. The Castle has been neglected for many years, but though it now stands a ruin the visitor can easily visualize the magnificent structure it might have been. It typifies an era long since past and naturally the present owners represent it only as it remains — a ruin.



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